University of Alberta

Attachment in Incarcerated Adolescent Gang Members

by

Nicole Elaine Kostiuk

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Education
in
Counselling Psychology

Department of Educational Psychology

Edmonton, Alberta
Fall, 2007

Library and Archives Canada

Published Heritage Branch

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Bibliothèque et Archives Canada

Direction du Patrimoine de l'édition

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file Votre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-33171-2
Our file Notre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-33171-2

NOTICE:
The author has granted a non-exclusive license allowing Library and Archives Canada to reproduce, publish, archive, preserve, conserve, communicate to the public by telecommunication or on the Internet, loan, distribute and sell theses worldwide, for commercial or non-commercial purposes, in microform, paper, electronic and/or any other formats.

The author retains copyright ownership and moral rights in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

AVIS:
L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque et Archives Canada de reproduire, publier, archiver, sauvegarder, conserver, transmettre au public par télécommunication ou par l'Internet, prêter, distribuer et vendre des thèses partout dans le monde, à des fins commerciales ou autres, sur support microforme, papier, électronique et/ou autres formats.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur et des droits moraux qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

In compliance with the Canadian Privacy Act some supporting forms may have been removed from this thesis.

While these forms may be included in the document page count, their removal does not represent any loss of content from the thesis.

Conformément à la loi canadienne sur la protection de la vie privée, quelques formulaires secondaires ont été enlevés de cette thèse.

Bien que ces formulaires aient inclus dans la pagination, il n'y aura aucun contenu manquant.

Canada

Abstract

This study examined the relationship between attachment and level of gang activity as measured by the Gang-Membership Inventory, as well as the convergent validity of the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment, Adolescent Attachment Questionnaire, and the Relationship Questionnaire. The sample consisted of 67 male and four female adolescents, aged 14-19 that were charged with a crime under the Youth Criminal Justice Act and were currently incarcerated at a detention facility. Questionnaires were completed by the youth. No relationship was found between attachment and level of gang activity, and the measures were partially correlated. Findings are discussed in relation to other research and future directions for research are suggested.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor for all of the time and effort he has put into this thesis. His encouragement and faith in me made this process easier and more enjoyable. I also appreciate the time, effort, and the feedback from my examining committee. Without the cooperation of the staff at the detention facility where data collection took place, this research would not have been possible. I would particularly like to thank Paulette who went above and beyond the call of duty to ensure that data collection occurred in a timely fashion. I would also like to thank Tim for his unconditional love and support throughout the past six years.

Tables

Table 1.
Descriptive Statistics of GMI, IPPA, AAQ, and RQ Scores

Table 2.
Descriptive Statistics of IPPA and AAQ Subscale Scores

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Gangs	1
Searching for Attachment	2
Attachment	3
Attachment in Gangs	6
Gangs and Self-Esteem	10
Gangs and School	12
Gangs and Socioeconomic Factors	14
Purpose of Present Study	15
Methodology	17
Sample	17
Measures	17
Description of Gang-Membership Inventory	17
Description of Relationship Questionnaire	18
Description of Adolescent Attachment Questionnaire	19
Description of Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment	19
Procedures	21
Ethics Approval	21
Results	22
Description of Sample	22
Description of Scores	22
Descriptive Statistics	22
Convergent Validity of Measures	27
Internal Reliability of Measures	28
Attachment and Gang Membership	30
Separation and Attachment	32
Discussion	33
Attachment in Sample	33
Convergent Validity of Attachment Measures	35
Internal Reliability of Measures	36
Gang Activity and Attachment	36
Attachment and Separation	38
Limitations of Current Study	38
Competing Theories on Gang Development and Other Risk Factors	41
Implications for Counselling	44
References	45

Introduction

Gangs

Gangs are not a new phenomenon, yet they are receiving increasing amounts of attention in the media. Gangs have grown in size and number; not only are there more people involved in gangs but there are simply more gangs. The growing number of gang members due to active recruitment and the consequent increase in the degree of violence employed by street gangs to control members, protect turf, and exact retribution has resulted in gangs and their activities to be of growing concern to Canadian society (Annual Report on Organized Crime in Canada, 2003). Although gang violence is often directed towards rival gangs, increased availability of firearms has increased the level of violence and public nature of the violence, posing an increased risk to the community at large (Annual Report on Organized Crime in Canada; Lloyd, 2002). Historically, gang violence was relatively restricted to within or between gangs; only rarely were bystanders unintentional victims. However, this is changing. The 1980's saw the first drive-by shootings, and since then these have become an almost common occurrence (Lloyd). With the increase in public violence has come an increase in innocent victims. No longer are gangs just the problem of people who live in the neighbourhoods, they have become everyone's problem (Lloyd).

Particularly worrisome has been the increase in adolescent gang membership. A subset of the offending population, estimated at 68% of institutionalized youth, are affiliated with a gang, yet little research has been done to distinguish gang members from other types of young offenders (Kratcoski & Kratcoski, 1996;

Richter-White, 2003). It may be that young people are turning to gangs for protection from other gangs, as a way to gain respect, to escape from troubled homes, because their friends are doing it, peer pressure, or as a way to earn a living through drug trafficking, illegal weapons sales, robbery, and theft (Lloyd, 2002). However, the reasons why adolescents choose to join a gang remain understudied with no clear answers.

Searching for Attachment

According to Erikson, one of the main goals of adolescence is the development of an identity (Muuss, 1996). Because of this, adolescence is often a time of increased family conflict. Arguments over dating, curfew, clothing, homework, and music are common in households with a teenager in them. However, family remains an important influence on the behaviour of youth and despite the conflicts over petty issues adolescents often adhere to the same values as their parents (Peters, 2001). But not all families are the same. While some families are characterized by healthy relationships between parent and adolescent, others are characterized by unhealthy relationships in the form of abuse, neglect, harsh, or unresponsive parenting. Indeed adolescents that do not have healthy relationships at home may go looking for a substitute family elsewhere.

One of the big appeals of gangs may be that they provide a substitute family; researchers and gang members (both current and ex) agree that the adolescent need for familial bonding is one of the motivations for joining a gang (Ponce, 2005; Walker-Barnes & Mason, 2001). In general, adolescent gang members experience

less parental involvement and supervision, more physical and sexual abuse, and have more anti-social parents and family members (Peters, 2001).

The substitute family hypothesis can be explained by attachment theory.

Attachment

Attachment, the social-emotional bond between infant and caregiver, identified by John Bowlby in a series of seminal studies and subsequent publications, is defined as seeking and maintaining proximity to another individual (Bowlby, 1969). This behaviour begins almost at birth and is hypothesized to have played an important evolutionary role: namely survival (Bowlby). Infants cry, activating caretaking behaviour in their caregiver, typically a parent (Ainsworth, 1989). Over time if the caregiver is consistently accepting of and responsive to the needs of the infant/child, the child develops a sense of trust in the caregiver. This in turn allows the child to feel safe enough to engage in exploratory behaviour away from the caregiver, as the child has learned that the caregiver is a safe base to which to return from their exploring (Bowlby; Sperling & Berman, 1994). The child internalizes a working model of the attachment figure as a positive view of others and because the caretaker has responded positively to the child, the child also internalizes a positive view of self (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). This is what is known as a secure attachment.

However, if the caregiver is not consistent, accepting, or responsive to the infant, but is instead undependable, hostile or even rejecting, an insecure attachment results (Sperling & Berman, 1994; Makar, 1992). Three types of insecure attachments have been postulated, although various researchers have labeled them

differently: anxious, avoidant, and disorganized. These three types of insecure attachment stem from Ainsworth's Strange Situation Paradigm and Main's work with the positive/negative view of self and others (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). In these cases an infant has internalized a negative view of self, of others, or both, and thus does not feel safe to engage in exploratory behaviours. An anxiously attached child has anxious or inconsistent caregivers, resulting in a child that is preoccupied with maintaining proximity to their attachment figure and not losing them (Sperling & Berman; Makar). These children feel inadequate and are overly sensitive to distressing situations. An avoidantly attached child has had an unresponsive caregiver that is overtly hostile or rejecting (Sperling & Berman; Makar). The child inhibits any attachment feelings or desire for close relationships, becoming deeply distrustful of others (Makar). Abusive parenting practices can result in an attachment style known as disorganized, which is characterized by contradictory behavior patterns, undirected, odd movements such as freezing, and clear signs of fear of the parents (Lyons-Ruth, Easterbrooks, & Libelli, 1997; Cassidy & Mohr, 2001).

The cognitive models of self and others that the child internalizes serve to guide them in their future relationships with others. While these models can change, attachment patterns are typically stable throughout life (Simpson & Rholes, 2004; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991); a securely attached child is likely to grow into a securely attached adult. Attachment patterns continue from infancy into adulthood with the success of future relationships dependant upon the success of previous ones (West, Rose, Spreng, Sheldon-Keller, & Adam, 1998; Carver & Scheier, 2004).

Securely attached individuals tend to have better social skills, better peer relations, more close friends, and show more evidence of internalized controls (Shaffer, Wood, & Willoughby, 2002; Lewis et al., 1984). Insecurely attached individuals are likely to demonstrate hostile and aggressive behaviour and thus be rejected by their peers, eliminating opportunities to affiliate with prosocial peers and the ability to create new attachments (Carver & Scheier, 2004; Lyons-Ruth, Alpern & Repacholi, 1993). They are more likely to have adjustment problems, develop more psychopathology in later life, have difficulty with social relationships with peers and adults, display more anger, show more externalizing behaviours, and demonstrate more deviant behaviours (Shaffer et al.; Lewis et al.; Carlson et al.).

Muris, Meesters, & van den Berg (2003) completed a study on 742 male and female adolescents, to determine if self-perceived insecure attachments were related to higher levels of internalizing and externalizing behaviours. Specifically they studied if parental rejection, overprotection, or lack of emotional warmth were related to more problem behaviours. It was found that insecurely attached youth displayed higher levels of both types of behaviours and that perceived parenting behaviours (low levels of emotional warmth and high levels of rejection and overprotection) were accompanined by high levels of psychopathological symptoms in adolescents.

In contrast to the typically 67% of the population that reports a secure attachment style, 79% of incarcerated adolescents report an insecure attachment style (Ward, Hudson, Marshall, 1996; Makar, 1992). Not only has insecure attachment been linked to offending behaviour, but it has also been linked to

increased difficulties in offenders. In a study of 68 incarcerated male young offenders, it was found that those who reported feeling let down by their caregiver or angry with them also reported more social and emotional difficulties. Specifically, those scoring high on the angry/distress subscale and low on the availability subscale of the Adolescent Attachment Questionnaire (AAQ) indicated more externalizing problems and increased drug use (Elgar, Knight, & Worral, 2003).

Attachment in Gangs

As previously mentioned, attachment theory, or the "substitute family" hypothesis, has been posited as an explanation for youth gang membership, with some support. In a study of 201 male adolescents in a juvenile detention centre, it was found that gang members were less committed to their families, experienced more conflict within the family, and were less satisfied with their families than non gang members (Cox, 1996). In addition, families of gang members are less likely to engage in activities such as meals and outings as a family (Walker-Barnes & Mason, 2001). So during a time when parental input and quality time together is still valued by adolescents, is the time when these particular parents were withdrawing from their children. The authors concluded "it may be that the existence of some family characteristics (e.g. less family cohesion, low family satisfaction, and increased family conflict) encouraged adolescent males to seek peer support from an extra-familial resource, the gang" (Cox, 1996, p. 22).

In a study of 48 self-identified gang members in Hawaii it was found that the parents of the youth were over-employed, that is holding down two or more jobs, and thus unable to provide supervision. The alternate scenario was that the parents

were physically present but still unable to provide adequate parenting due to worries of being unemployed or underemployed (Joe, 1995). The gang members in this study reported a sense of isolation from their families. In addition, 55% of boys and 75 % of girls reported physical abuse in their families of origin, while 62% of the girls also reported sexual abuse (Joe). It is hypothesized that the gang in this instance was providing not only a sense of belonging, but was serving another purpose as well; protection (Joe). Adolescents in gangs learn how to fight back. It was reasoned that in abuse situations the gang's role as a surrogate family became even greater.

The Pittsburgh Youth Study, a longitudinal study, found that lack of parental supervision in the seventh grade actually predicted gang membership by 15 years of age among black males (Walker-Barnes & Mason, 2001). The Rochester Youth Development study found that in addition to inadequate parental supervision, low attachment was related to higher levels of gang-involvement (Walker-Barnes & Mason).

A study of Chinese youth aged 15-18, found that gang youth had less open communication with their mothers and that their mothers were more controlling compared to control youth (Kee, Sim, Teoh, Tian, & Ng, 2003).

In support of Bowlby's theory that initial relationships lay the foundation for future relationships, Longorio (2005) found that incarcerated Latino youth had similar attachment styles to parents and peers. The importance of friendships in adolescence is well-researched, with peer acceptance or bonding becoming as important as familial bonding. The gang can be viewed as merely another type of

friendship group, albeit not necessarily a positive one. As previously discussed, the gang may serve a need for affiliation and even reinforce this sense of belonging, perhaps more than do other peer groups, through tattoos, wearing colours, shared language, handsigns, and affectionate nicknames such as homeboy and bro (Ponce, 2005). Making friends or having more and/or closer friends is one of the frequently cited advantages of gang membership by researchers and gang members (Wiederhold, 1999).

One of the strongest predictors of adolescent delinquency has consistently been found to be delinquent peers (Walker-Barnes & Mason, 2001; Walker-Barnes, 2000). Not only do gang-involved youth have more friends involved in gangs than do youth not involved in gangs, but often gang-involved youth associate exclusively with other gang members, removing altogether the possibility of pro-social influences by other peers (Peters, 2001). In a year-long longitudinal study of 300 youth in ninth grade English, it was found that higher levels of peer gang involvement and peer gang delinquency were related to higher levels of gang involvement (Walker-Barnes & Mason, 2004). The results of this study are supported by findings in an earlier study by Walker-Barnes (2000). It was found that peer gang involvement was the strongest predictor of initial level of gang involvement. That is, adolescents with no gang-involved peers had virtually no risk of becoming gang-involved themselves. Adolescents, on the other hand, with many gang-involved peers were at much higher risk of becoming involved with a gang. This was particularly true for African American youth (Walker-Barnes). Curry and Spergel (1992) found that having gang-involved peers was significantly related to

gang membership among Black but not Hispanic youth. Ethnicity again seems to be a mediating factor in peer gang involvement.

Adolescents, naturally prone to going along with their friends, may join a gang for no other reason than all of their friends are doing it. Peer pressure may play an important role in youths' decisions to join gangs. Both male and female adolescents attest that peer pressure often plays a role in committing crimes, therefore it is not that big of a leap in logic to assume that peer pressure may also be contributing to gang membership. Supporting this idea is the fact that some of the most common reasons for joining a gang given by gang members are the desire for companionship/sense of belonging, and peer pressure (Wiederhold, 1997; Dukes, Martinez, & Stein, 1997). Support for this line of reasoning is found in a study of high risk youth by Walker-Barnes (1998) who found that pressure from friends to join a gang was one of the strongest predictors for gang membership (as cited in Walker-Barnes, 2000).

The previous findings assume that youth have friends that may be pressuring them into joining a gang. This does not take into account the fact that many gang members join a gang precisely because they lack friends, hence the findings that adolescents join gangs to make friends. In a study of 714 adolescents and their families, it was found that being disliked by peers in 6th grade predicted gang involvement by 8th grade (Dishion, Nelson, & Yasui, 2005). Rejection by pro-social peers, perhaps due to childhood aggression, racism, or any other number of factors, leads to association with a deviant peer group, and a gang is just one form of a deviant peer group (Peters, 2001). Many other risk factors have been identified as

being linked to gang-membership, including self-esteem, education, and low socio-economic status. These factors can be also be explained by attachment theory.

Gangs and Self-Esteem

Because of the elusive nature of self-esteem, many definitions of the term exist, although the idea is essentially the same. Self-esteem has been defined as one's evaluation of one's worth as a person based on an assessment of the qualities that make up the self-concept (Shaffer, Wood, & Willoughby, 2002). This evaluation can be positive or negative depending on a multitude of personal, familial, and social factors. Typically a positive evaluation leading to high self-esteem is seen as a protective factor. Viewed through attachment theory, high self-esteem is equivalent to a positive internal working model of self.

Similar to secure attachment, higher self-esteem tends to be linked to pro-social behaviours such as academic achievement, lower rates of delinquency, and the ability to mediate stressful events better (Peters, 2001). However, adolescence can be a time of multiple stressors: transition to a different school, puberty, dating, and conflict with family or other authority figures such as teachers (Shaffer et al., 2002). All of these stressors combined with the development of the imaginary audience (a preoccupation with what others are thinking about the self) can lead to a lowering of self-esteem (Shaffer et al.). Low self-esteem, which may actually be indicative of insecure attachments, is a risk factor that has been linked to a variety of problems including dysphoric emotions, substance abuse, irresponsible sexual behavior, eating disorders, aggression, and membership in deviant groups (Peters).

Self-esteem in gangs is equated with status and reputation, a "rep" that most gang members will fight to protect. This may actually be indicative of low self-esteem; if one had high self-esteem one would not feel the need to defend it so fiercely. Perhaps youth with low self-esteem are more likely to join gangs and once in a gang self-esteem appears to increase, as these youth become less likely to admit weaknesses and overall more boastful (Peters, 2001).

A study by Wang (1994) compared gang members and non-gang members' self-esteem in a sample of 155 African-American and Caucasian youth. It was found that gang members had significantly lower levels of self-esteem compared to non-gang members; that is, they had a less positive view of themselves (Wang). Results from a study by Dukes, Martinez, and Stein (1997) support Wang's findings. Dukes et al. examined 11,000 secondary school students' responses to a questionnaire that included questions on background variables, gang membership, use of drugs, delinquency, self-concept, education, and family, among others. It was found that active gang members and those who wanted to become gang members had the lowest scores on measures of self-esteem. However being in a gang seemed to improve the self-esteem of its members, probably due to the gang's initial support and affirmation. The authors speculate that the gang may eventually become a negative reference point, leading to low self-esteem again.

However, in a study of male and female adolescents between the ages of 13 and 17 on an inpatient psychiatric unit, it was found that overall the 22 gang members scored in the high range of self-esteem on Rosenberg's scale of perceived self-esteem while the 35 non-gang members scored in the medium range (McKay,

1998). Thus gang members actually had higher self-esteem than did non-gang members. A possible explanation for these conflicting findings may be that while low self-esteem leads to gang-membership, once in the gang self-esteem increases because of the sense of belonging that many youth find in a gang. This sense of belonging can ultimately be viewed as a variant of attachment.

Viewed through the lens of attachment theory, this research provides more support for the idea that adolescents join gangs in search of a more positive view of self, leading to more secure attachments.

Gangs and School

Adolescents spend the majority of their time at home and at school. Thus the education system cannot help but be a huge influence on adolescents. School provides a place not only for academics, but for extracurricular activities and peer interactions as well. A student achieving well in school with good peer and teacher relationships, is likely to feel good about themselves and their school experience translating into secure attachments in the school environment.

Academic achievement helps to shape an adolescents' attachment to their school and also their community (Peters, 2001). Adolescents who feel good about their abilities as students translate this into self-confidence, which increases educational bonds and the view that education is the ladder to success (Dukes et al., 1997). Students that perform well in school and feel connected to their school are generally not interested in becoming gang members and display less delinquent behaviour overall (Dukes et al.).

Conversely, lack of academic success lowers the attachment that an adolescent may feel towards their school and community, representing just one more severed connection from society. Feeling disconnected or alienated from school, and thus more broadly from society, is another motivation to join a gang in order to achieve that connection in some other way. Adolescents may feel alienated from school for a variety of reasons including discriminatory practices and lack of resources (Peters, 2001).

Doing poorly in school has been associated with gang membership. Gang members report less academic orientation and less aspiration (Dukes et al., 1997). However, the question remains: Is low academic achievement a result of gang membership or does low academic achievement contribute to gang membership? Vigil assumes that youth involved in gangs achieve less in school and that this educational failure is present prior to gang involvement (as cited in Peters, 2001). He argues that low academic achievement contributes to gang membership as opposed to resulting from it (as cited in Peters). In support of this are findings from a study by Dishion et al. (2005), which found that doing poorly in school, specifically sixth grade in this study, predicts gang involvement by eighth grade.

These research findings very closely support attachment theory in that feelings of alienation are associated with insecure attachments. Students who feel alienated from school or society may in fact be insecurely attached and therefore more at risk for anti-social behaviours.

Likewise, positive relationships, or secure attachments, in school can act as a buffer against other risk factors. In fact, positive teacher-student relationships have

been linked with higher levels of academic achievement, higher levels of self-esteem, and lower levels of behavioural problems (Peters, 2001). The idea that one teacher, one positive role model, can change the course of gang members' lives has been popularized by Hollywood movies such as Dangerous Minds. However the idea is not without merit. It has been theorized that negative teacher-student relationships may be one factor in youth gang involvement (Peters). In one study by Wang (1994) gang involvement was associated with the absence of an adult role model, such as a teacher.

Gangs and Socioeconomic Factors

Socioeconomic factors may also play a role in an adolescent's motivation to join a gang. In the same way that doing poorly in school leads to feeling alienated from school, failing to meet society's goals can lead to feeling alienated from society. Feeling alienated from society, resulting in a negative view of others and possibly self, has been linked with insecure attachment.

The fact that gangs are more likely to develop in areas that are poor and disorganized with few supportive structures has been well documented (Peters, 2001). Drug trafficking and gangs have become almost synonymous. As lucrative as the drug trade can be, gangs also offer financial incentive in the form of robbery, burglary, auto-theft, and other petty crimes (Peters). Obtaining wealth, even through illegal means, is a temptation difficult to ignore, particularly in low socioeconomic areas where there are limited financial opportunities (Ponce, 2005). These areas are characterized by limited stable employment and lacking in financial resources. The decay of the inner city, seen in almost all major urban centers, results in a decay in

employment opportunities as well (Ponce). The quality of resources in these neighbourhoods is already limited or nonexistent and is eroding even further (Peters). Thus illegal activities become the norm for achieving financial status and security.

One of the best predictors of gang membership in the Dukes et al. (1997) study of 11,000 secondary school children was socioeconomic status, as measured by the level of the father's education. That is children of fathers who had less than a high school education were at higher risk for gang membership than children whose fathers had more than a high school education. This may be due to a modelling effect. Parents who display little value for educational achievement, as demonstrated by their own failure to finish high school, pass these values onto their children. Lack of interest in educational achievement and the promise of later success that goes with it is associated with increased involvement in gangs (Wiederhold, 1997).

As can be seen, direct and indirect support for the role of attachment in gang-membership exists.

Purpose of the Present Study

The present study is multi-purpose. The primary purpose is to add to the limited research on adolescent motivation for joining gangs, specifically how attachment may play a role. It is not known if there is a difference in the type or degree of attachment between offending gang members and offending non-gang members (Lyn & Burton, 2005).

It is also possible that separation from caregivers, such as group or foster home placements experienced by many adolescent offenders, disrupts the attachment relationship (Bowlby, 1969). This study also intends to investigate this possibility.

Given the many available attachment measures, the second purpose of this study is to determine the convergent validity of several attachment measures. The realization that attachment styles tend to be relatively stable has spawned research viewing attachment from a life-span perspective. Attachment has been studied in infants, children, adolescents, and adulthood, with different types of relationships being examined: parents, peers, and romantic partners. This broader look at attachment has resulted in numerous methods for assessing attachment. Questionnaires have been widely used to measure attachment styles, however there are numerous measures due to the different aspects of attachment theory, the need to assess attachment in distinct developmental periods, and the different types of relationships studied (Becker, Billings, Eveleth, Gilbert 1997; Fairchild, 2006).

Based upon the available research presented in the above review of the literature, three main hypotheses have been developed:

1) Young offenders who are more closely affiliated with gangs will be less securely attached than offenders who do not have any involvement with gangs.

2) Young offenders who have been separated from their natural parents, disregarding their current incarceration, will be less securely attached than those who have not experienced such a separation.

3) The attachment measures used in this study will be highly intercorrelated.

Methodology

Sample

Seventy-one young offenders, 4 females and 67 males aged 14 – 19, were recruited over a seven-month period from a maximum security detention facility serving central Alberta. This facility has eight units: seven for male and one for female offenders, therefore more males than females were represented in the sample because of their greater representation in the facility. All participants had been charged with a crime under the Youth Criminal Justice Act and were currently in custody.

Measures

To measure gang membership, one questionnaire the Gang Membership Inventory by Pillen and Hoewing-Roberson (1992) was selected. To measure attachment style, three different self-report questionnaires were selected: the Relationship Questionnaire designed by Bartholomew & Horowitz (1991), the Adolescent Attachment Questionnaire (West et al. 1998), and Armsden and Greenberg's (1987) Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment.

Description of the Gang-Membership Inventory.

The Gang-Membership Inventory (GMI), designed by Pillen and Hoewing-Roberson (1992), was used to measure gang affiliation. This instrument does not determine membership categorically (i.e. gang-member or not), but rather on a continuum. Thus one is more or less affiliated with a gang. It is a 15-item yes/no measure that examines any gang activity, such as hand signs or carrying weapons, that the respondent has directly or indirectly (through family or friends) experienced.

Participants were instructed to refer to the year prior to their current incarceration when answering this questionnaire due to reduced opportunity to participate in gang activity while incarcerated. Four questions relating specifically to being a gang leader and selling drugs for a gang were dropped from the measure as requested by the detention facility. In the secure setting regulations are such that disclosure of these types of activities is considered to be glorifying their criminal behaviour. In order to gain any additional or missing information, a supplementary yes/no question was added to the questionnaire, inquiring if there was any other gang activity in which the participant had been involved. If subjects answered yes, they were asked to give a brief description of the activity. This information was gathered for possible use in future gang research. This resulted in a 13-item measure with one open-ended question.

Description of the Relationship Questionnaire.

The Relationship Questionnaire (RQ) was selected as it allows for categorization of attachment style into the four dimensions based upon the internalization of the positive/negative view of self/others (secure, anxious, avoidant, and disorganized). Participants are presented with four descriptions and asked to rate how well each describes how they feel about relationships on a seven-point Likert scale and then to select the one that best describes them. Because of the relatively advanced wording on the RQ it was altered to reflect the developmental and educational level of the population. A similar instrument, Hazan and Shaver's Attachment Questionnaire (AQ), which allows for categorization into only three of the attachment style categories, was modified by Sharpe et al. (1998) for use with

children (as cited in Muris, Meesters, van Melick, & Zwambag, 2001). Because of the similarity of the two instruments, the wording from the child version of the AQ was used to alter the RQ.

Description of the Adolescent Attachment Questionnaire.

The Adolescent Attachment Questionnaire (AAQ) is a nine-item questionnaire based on the Adult Attachment Interview, which is considered to be the "gold standard" for assessing attachment in adults (West et al. 1998). Participants are asked to rate each statement on a seven-point Likert scale, resulting in both categorical and continuous data. The highest possible score, indicating a more secure attachment is 27, while the lowest is –9. The AAQ has three subscales each consisting of three questions: angry distress, availability, and goal-corrected partnership corresponding to anxious, secure, and avoidant attachment. On all three scales, the highest score is 15, the lowest 3. The angry distress subscale is reverse scored, meaning that the higher the number, the more anger and distress the participant feels towards the parental figure and therefore a lesser degree of attachment. Although data from the AAQ can be used as categorical according to West, the decision was made to view AAQ data as continuous.

Description of the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment.

The AAQ assesses parental attachment, while the RQ refers to relationships in general. In order to directly assess peer attachment the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA) was included as the third attachment style measure. The short nature of both the AAQ and the RQ allowed for a longer instrument to be incorporated into the study. The IPPA consists of a parental section and a

corresponding peer section, with a total of 53 questions, rated on a five-point Likert Scale. The IPPA results in continuous data, such that the higher the score on each section, the more secure the attachment. Parent and peer attachment are considered separately, as they are not strongly related (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987). Each section, parent and peer, has three subsections: alienation, trust, and communication with some items on each scale being reverse scored. Similar to the angry distress subscale on the AAQ, on the IPPA alienation subscales higher scores are indicative of greater feelings of alienation and therefore less attachment. Parent and peer attachment scores are calculated by adding the trust and communication scores together and subtracting the alienation score.

The parental section consists of 28 questions, with a maximum score of 92 and a minimum score of -20. The Parental Communication and Trust scales consist of 10 questions, while the Alienation scale has eight questions. The highest possible score on parental communication and trust is 50, while the lowest scores is10. On the Parental Alienation scale, the lowest possible score is eight, the highest 40.

The peer section consists of 25 questions, maximum score of 83, minimum score of –17. The Peer Communication, trust, and alienation scale consists of 8, 10, and 7 questions respectively. On peer communication and trust, the range is 40 and 8, and 44 and 4, respectively. Peer alienation has as its highest score 35 and its lowest 7.

In addition to answering the questions, subjects were also asked their age, gender, and apart from being in custody, if they had lived their entire life with their natural parents.

Procedures

Youth at the facility were invited to participate in a research project. If interested, the youth submitted their names to a staff member and if under the age of 18, their parents/guardians were contacted by facility staff members. The study was explained in detail to parents/guardians over the phone, at which time verbal consent for the participation of their child was obtained. If the youth was 18 years of age or older they were able to consent for themselves, in which case parents/guardians were not contacted. Participants were then brought together in groups of 7-12 in which the study was explained, assent was obtained from the underage and questionnaire packages were administered. The IPPA was given first, followed by the GMI, AAQ and RQ. The questionnaires were read aloud to facilitate comprehension, which precluded counterbalancing the questionnaires. Several participants completed the packages individually, as they were not allowed to be in a group for various reasons (e.g. seclusion). Each of these participants was asked if they required help with reading, all of whom declined.

Ethics Approval

Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Alberta Faculties of Education, Extension and Augustana Research Ethics Board and the Solicitor General and Public Security Correctional Services Division.

Results

Description of the Sample

In order to have a more comprehensive picture of the adolescent sample, descriptive statistics were generated. The participants were between the ages of 14 and 19, average age was 16.93, with 18 being the modal age. Of the 67 male subjects, 28 reported having lived only with their natural parents, other than being in custody, while two male participants did not answer this question. Thirty-seven of the male participants and all four of the female subjects had lived with others besides their natural parents.

Description of Scores

Frequency distributions (measures of central tendency, range, and standard deviations) were calculated for the questionnaire scores and are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1.

Descriptive Statistics of GMI, IPPA, AAQ, and RQ Scores

Variable	Mode	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
GMI	10	0	11	6.02	3.45
IPPA Parents	51	-7	75	42.75	18.25
IPPA Peers	32	2	66	41.88	13.12
AAQ	18	-8	27	16.09	7.36
RQ Secure	6	1	7	5.21	1.59
RQ Anxious	1	1	7	2.94	1.67
RQ Avoidant	4	1	7	4.56	2.10
RQ Disorganized	1	1	7	3.71	1.24

Note. n = varies between 64 and 71

While seven participants reported no gang activity on the GMI, no participant received the highest score on gang activity, which was a 12. Three participants did receive a score of 11 however. In response to the open-ended question, several different responses were given. The most frequently occurring response was selling, dealing, or running drugs for a gang which was given 13 times; in spite of the removal of these questions from the original GMI, some participants nevertheless addressed these issues in the open-ended question. The next most frequently occurring response occurred seven times and referred to fighting or beating people up. Murder and robbing people or stores each occurred twice and home invasions and shooting at police were each given once. One response seemed to indicate survival as a reason for joining a gang "I am a ***** ***** gang member and for the last year I selling drugs and shooting up houses and getting into fights and all this started when I join a gang. It is hard to live in ****** you have to be in a gang to stay safe if you are not you will always get pick on by everyone on the ***** because everyone on the ***** is a gang member."

Table 2 summarizes the range, mean, and standard deviation of the subscale scores for the IPPA and AAQ.

Table 2.

Descriptive Statistics of IPPA and AAQ Subscale Scores

Variable	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
IPPA Parental				
Communication	10	43	29.74	7.82
Trust	11	47	35.51	7.45
Alienation	8	36	22.59	6.19
IPPA Peer				
Communication	11	37	26.23	5.54
Trust	11	48	36.46	6.90
Alienation	14	29	20.87	3.27
AAQ				
Availability	3	15	11.07	3.00
Goal-Corrected				
Partnership	3	15	12.53	2.80
Angry Distress	3	14	7.32	3.06

Note. n = varies between 64 and 71

Data from the RQ was interpreted with caution, as participants often chose two statements as being most like them. Participants seemed to be unclear as to how to answer the question, "Which statement best describes and resembles how you feel about relationships in general?", often selecting a statement they had previously described as not being like them, or seemingly choosing a random number. When there was any confusion as to which statement the participant had chosen as best

describing them, the statement they had rated with the highest number on the Likert scale was chosen. If there was a tie between two statements the most insecure of the two was chosen, as it is contrary to attachment theory to be both securely and insecurely attached. If two insecure statements were tied, the most insecure of the two were chosen. For example, if anxious and avoidant was tied, avoidant was selected.

According to the RQ, 27 participants classified themselves as securely attached while 37 classified themselves as insecurely attached. Specifically, 2 categorized themselves as anxiously attached, 21 as avoidantly attached, and 14 classified themselves as having a disorganized attachment style. Categorization was not possible for four of the participants as they had selected neutral for all four attachment styles and information from another three participants was missing. Overall, 42.2% of participants classified themselves as securely attached and 57.8% as insecurely attached.

In order to use their instrument to categorize subjects into secure and insecure attachment styles, Armsden and Greenberg (1987) used the following rules to define attachment groups after dividing the possible subscale scores into thirds and assigning each participant a rating of low, medium, or high for each subscale based on where their score fell:

1. Participants are assigned to a High Security (HS) group if their Alienation scores are not high, and their Trust and Communication scores are at least medium level. Where Trust and Alienation scores are both medium, HS assignment is not made.

2. Participants are assigned to the Low Security (LS) group if their Trust and Communication scores are both low and Alienation scores are medium or high. If Trust or Communication is medium, but the other is low, LS assignment is made if Alienation is high.

Following this procedure in the current study classification was possible for 55% of the participants on parental attachment and for 51% on peer attachment. On parental attachment, 44% (30 participants) were classified into the HS group and 10% (7 participants) were classified as LS. For peer attachment, 47% (32 participants) were placed into the HS group, while 3% (2 participants) were placed into the LS group.

The high security attachment percentages on the IPPA (44% and 47%) correspond with the 42.2% secure attachment from the RQ. However, 57.8% on the RQ were classified as insecure, while only 10% and 3% were low security on the IPPA.

As Armsden and Greenberg (1987) have acknowledged this particular method of classifying attachment styles as exploratory only, it was used only to compare frequencies of attachment styles with the Relationship Questionnaire. Continuous data were used for the rest of the analyses.

Of the current sample, 10.9% indicated that they had experienced no gang activity, either directly or indirectly, on the GMI. The remaining 89.1% reported experiencing some gang activity. Following the Armsden and Greenberg (1987) classification method for the IPPA, scores on the GMI were divided into thirds. This resulted in 29.7% of participants scoring in the top third and 35.9% scoring in the

middle third of the Gang Membership Inventory. Together, 65.6% of the current sample had a medium to high level of gang-involved activities.

Convergent Validity of Measure

In order to determine if the instruments were measuring the same construct and therefore guide further analyses, it was decided to first test the hypothesis that the various attachment measures used in this study would be highly correlated. To do this, Pearson's product-moment correlations were calculated between each attachment measure score as well as the subscale scores. Significant correlations were found between some measures and subscales, providing partial support for the hypothesis.

It was found that the Adolescent Attachment Questionnaire score was positively correlated with parental attachment ($r = .810$, $p < .01$), parental communication ($r = .702$, $p < .01$), and parental trust ($r = .739$, $p < .01$) but was negatively correlated with parental alienation ($r = -.595$, $p < .01$) on the IPPA.

The Parental attachment score on the IPPA was found to correlate with the availability subscale score ($r = .823$, $p < .01$), the goal-corrected partnership subscale score ($r = .679$, $p < .01$), and the angry distress subscale score ($r = -.518$, $p < .01$) on the AAQ.

Various parental subscales on the IPPA correlated with subscales on the AAQ as well. Parental communication on the IPPA was found to be positively correlated with goal-corrected partnership ($r = .548$, $p < .01$) and availability ($r = .827$, $p < .01$) but was negatively correlated with angry distress ($r = -.379$, $p < .01$). Parental Trust was found to be positively correlated with goal-corrected partnership

($r = .716$, $p < .01$) and availability ($r = .738$, $p < .01$), but negatively correlated with angry distress ($r = -.392$, $p < .01$) Parental alienation was found to correlated positively with angry distress ($r = .565$, $p < .01$) and negatively with availability ($r = -.481$, $p < .01$) and goal-corrected partnership ($r = .441$, $p < .01$)

Neither the AAQ nor its subscales correlated with the peer attachment score or the peer subscales on the IPPA.

There was some relationship between the peer section of the IPPA and the RQ however. Peer attachment was positively correlated with secure attachment ($r = .468$, $p < .01$), as was peer trust ($r = .385$, $p < .01$), and peer communication ($r = .421$, $p < .01$). Peer alienation was negatively correlated with secure attachment ($r = -.302$, $p < .05$), while peer communication was negatively correlated with avoidant attachment ($r = -.281$, $p < .05$).

Attachment on the AAQ was negatively correlated with anxious attachment ($r = -.301$, $p < .05$) on the RQ, while the angry distress subscale was positively correlated with anxious attachment ($r = .415$, $p < .01$).

Overall, partial support was found for this hypothesis.

Internal Reliability of Attachment Measures

Because parent and peer attachment were not correlated with each other as expected, post-hoc analysis of the measures for internal reliability was conducted. Pearson's product-moment correlations were calculated for each measure.

On the IPPA, the following correlations were found. Parental attachment was positively correlated with the communication and trust subscale scores ($r = .894$ and $r = .897$, respectively, $p < .01$), and negatively correlated with alienation ($r = -$

.731, $p < .01$). The communication subscale score was highly correlated with the trust subscale score ($r = .756$, $p < .01$). The alienation subscale score was negatively correlated with both the communication and the trust subscale scores ($r = -.453$, $p < .01$, and $r = -.479$, $p < .01$).

The peer attachment score was highly correlated with the communication, trust, and alienation subscale scores ($r = .878$, $p < .01$, $r = .930$, $p < .01$, and $r = -.532$, $p < .01$). The peer communication score was highly correlated with the trust subscale score ($r = .739$, $p < .010$, while the alienation subscale score was negatively correlated with both ($r = -.241$, $p < .01$ and $r = -.333$, $p < .01$ for communication and trust, respectively).

However, the parental attachment score was not correlated with the peer attachment score, nor were any of the subscale scores correlated. Support for the internal reliability of the parental and peer subsection on the IPPA was found. However, the parent and the peer subsections were found not to correlate with each other.

The AAQ showed a similar pattern of correlations as the IPPA, such that the AAQ scores were highly correlated with the subscale scores, with subscale scores being interrelated as well. The AAQ score was positively correlated with availability ($r = .851$, $p < .01$) and goal-corrected partnership ($r = .844$, $p < .01$) but was negatively correlated with angry distress ($r = -.801$, $p < .01$). The Availability subscale score was positively correlated with the goal-corrected partnership subscale score ($r = .649$, $p < .01$), while the angry distress subscale score was negatively correlated with both goal-corrected partnership and availability ($r = -.481$, $p < .01$)

and ($r = -.488$, $p < .01$), respectively. Support for the internal reliability of the AAQ was found.

On the RQ, Pearson's product-moment correlations were calculated between each of the four descriptions. The secure statement on the Relationship Questionnaire was negatively correlated with disorganized attachment ($r = -.343$ $p < .01$), while anxious attachment was positively correlated with disorganized attachment ($r = .382$, $p < .01$), again providing partial support for the internal reliability of this measure.

Since the analyses indicated that the measures were internally reliable, at least to some degree, it was decided to test the remaining hypotheses of the current study.

Attachment and Gang Membership

In order to test the hypothesis that young offenders who are more closely affiliated with gangs will be less securely attached than offenders who do not have any involvement with gangs, Pearson's product-moment correlations were calculated between the GMI score and the IPPA parental and peer attachment scores as well as their subscales, the AAQ score and it's subscales, and the RQ. To examine this relationship, 2-tailed tests of association were used. Results of this analysis revealed no correlation between level of gang activity and with parent attachment, peer attachment, or with any of the subscales (e.g. communication, trust, alienation, angry distress, availability, and goal-corrected partnership) on any of the attachment measures, failing to support the hypothesis.

To find out if any aspect of attachment was related to level of gang membership, post-hoc analysis was conducted. Pearson's product-moment correlations were calculated between the GMI score and each of its items and each item on the IPPA, AAQ, and RQ, as well as their total scores.

This analysis revealed that level of gang activity and individual questions on the GMI were correlated with 16 individual questions on the IPPA and one question on the availability subscale of the AAQ. On the IPPA, nine of the questions were from the parental section; four from the alienation and communication subscales, and one from the trust subscale. The other seven questions were from the peer section: four from the alienation subscale, two from the trust subscale, and one from the communication subscale. However, when a Bonferoni adjustment was applied to control for chance findings, only five of these correlations remained significant. The Bonferoni adjustment was calculated by multiplying the 53 questions in the IPPA and the 9 questions in the AAQ by the 12 questions on the GMI, resulting in 744 tests being run. The 0.05 significance level was then divided by 744, resulting in a significance level of less than 0.01, therefore only correlations that were significant at the 0.01 level were reported.

For example, making gang hand signs was positively correlated with "I don't know whom I can depend on these days" ($r = .261$, $p < .01$). Taking part in a fight representing a gang was positively correlated with "My friends sense when I'm upset about something" ($r = .343$, $p < .01$). Being involved with other gang activity that was not on the GMI was negatively correlated with "I feel that no one understands me" ($r = -.324$, $p < .01$) and "It seems as if my friends are irritated with

me for no reason" ($r = -.270$, $p < .01$). Carrying a weapon to protect oneself was negatively correlated with feeling that no one understands ($r = -.338$, $p < .01$).

Separation and Attachment

In order to test the hypothesis that young offenders who have been separated from their natural parents, disregarding their current incarceration, will be less securely attached than those who have not experienced such a separation Pearson's product – moment correlations were calculated between having lived only with natural parents and parental attachment, parental communication, parental trust, and parental alienation from the IPPA, and with availability, goal-corrected partnership, and angry distress from the AAQ, as well as the total score from the AAQ, and with the RQ. To examine this relationship, 2-tailed tests of association were used. Significant correlations were found between having lived only with their natural parents and parental attachment ($r = .361$, $p < .01$), parental communication ($r = .322$, $p < .01$), and parental trust ($r = .401$, $p < .01$) on the IPPA and with availability on the AAQ ($r = .249$, $p < .05$). No significant correlations were found with the other scores, resulting in partial support for the hypothesis.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to add to the existing literature on adolescent gangs and the role that attachment may play in this phenomenon. Based upon a sample of incarcerated young offenders, this study obtained levels of gang activity and examined the relationship between this activity and attachment style. Living circumstances, that is living with natural parents or with others, was also investigated to examine the correlates of attachment and separation from parents. Various attachment measures were also correlated to determine convergent validity, as well as internal reliability.

Attachment in the Sample

Attachment theory posits that one's first attachments provide the rules that govern social relationships. If a child's relationships are based upon consistent, accepting, and responsive caregiving, then the child internalizes secure, positive models of self and others in relationship. This in turn leads to becoming attached to and internalizing societal values. The securely attached child learns to cope with their aggressive or destructive impulses in a pro-social manner, allowing them to form secure attachments with others, including their peers, conformity to societal rules and a desire to be constructive in society results. The majority of people, approximately 67%, consider themselves to be securely attached, meaning that they are securely attached both to other people and to society as a whole (Makar, 1992). However, for the 33% that are insecurely attached to people and society, they feel little to no need to conform to societal values. The majority of offenders, 79%, identify themselves as being insecurely attached (Makar). They feel that they have

been rejected by society, unable to achieve success, and thus have little reason to conform to societal expectation (Kaplan, Johnson, & Bailey, 1986, 1987).

The results of the current study partially support previous conclusions, finding that 57.8% of young offenders feel themselves to be insecurely attached, as measured by the Relationship Questionnaire (RQ). While this is not as high as the previously reported 79% found in incarcerated populations, it is higher than the 33% that is found in the average population.

However, these percentages are not supported when classification of attachment style is made using an exploratory method with data from the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment. This method found that 10% were insecurely attached to parents, while only 3% were insecurely attached to peers. Since this does not support previous findings or even current findings with the RQ, this calls into question the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA) as a valid method of categorizing attachment styles. However, this classification method did categorize 44% and 47% as securely attached to parents and peers, respectively, which corresponds with the 42.2% found using the RQ.

In addition, the IPPA allows for only 46% of the sample to be categorized on parental attachment and 49% on peer attachment. Similarly, in Armsden and Greenberg's (1987) study, they were able to categorize 66% of the sample on parental attachment and 49% on peer attachment, again leaving the mid-range scores undefined. Armsden and Greenberg note that this method categorizes only an extreme form of insecure attachment and that more than one pattern of insecure

attachment may be discernible. Future exploration into categorizing attachment styles based on the IPPA is needed.

Convergent Validity of Attachment Measures

The AAQ and the parental section of the IPPA were highly correlated as were their subscales, indicating a high degree of convergent validity between these two measures. Therefore, the third hypothesis in this study, that the attachment measures would be highly correlated, was partially supported.

Although utilizing the RQ 42.2% of the sample as securely attached in relationships in general, this questionnaire did not correlate with the parental attachment score on the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment or with the Adolescent Attachment Questionnaire. It did however correlate with peer attachment, as measured by the IPPA peer subsection. It seems likely then that the Relationship Questionnaire was measuring peer attachment in this study and is not an indication of general attachment style.

However, if the theory holds true, peer attachment style should be related to parental attachment style, as parental attachment lays the foundation for future relationships, meaning they are at least related constructs. Which means that even if the RQ was measuring peer attachment, it should be correlated with parental attachment on the AAQ and the parental section of the IPPA if only because peer attachment should resemble parental attachment. It did not, implying that peer attachment and parent attachment are not related.

Indeed, peer attachment and parental attachment were not correlated even on the same measure, the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment, nor were any of the

subscales correlated. Armsden and Greenberg (1987) found that they were related, although not strongly, obtaining coefficients of .33, .29, and .47 for the Trust, Communication, and Alienation scales respectively.

From these results, several questions are raised. Is attachment to parents and peers the same, or even a similar, construct? Is attachment style as stable as previously thought? Clearly, internalized working models of self and others may not be as stable as originally thought. Further investigation into the construct of attachment and the stability of attachment patterns in adolescents is needed.

Internal Reliability of Measures

Internally, there was a high degree of correlation between subscales scores and total scores on the AAQ, and for parent and peer attachment on the IPPA. It was less clear on the RQ however, as it was expected that the insecure attachments would be negatively correlated with secure attachment and positively correlated with each other. This was partially upheld, as disorganized attachment was negatively associated with secure attachment and positively associated with anxious attachment. Because of the difficulties with this instrument in this study, conclusions based upon it are difficult to draw.

Gang Activity and Attachment

It has been estimated that 68% of institutionalized youth are affiliated with a gang. This estimate is supported by the results of the current study, in which 65.6% of participants had been involved in at least a moderate level of gang activity. In fact, only 10.9% of the sample reported having experienced no gang activity, either directly or indirectly. This implies that previously reported estimates may be

relatively conservative and may in fact be as high as 90%, depending on how affiliation is defined.

Despite previous research findings that adolescent need for familial bonding is motivation for joining a gang (Ponce, 2005; Walker-Barnes & Mason, 2001), this study did not find any support for this idea. Attachment style was not found to be related in any manner to gang activity. In general, previous research has found that adolescent gang members experience less parental involvement and supervision (Peters, 2001), which may correspond with the Parental Alienation subscale on the IPPA and/or the Availability subscale on the AAQ. However neither of these subscales was found to be related to gang-membership. These findings clearly do not support the substitute family hypothesis.

From this study, it can be concluded that gang-members are no different than their non-gang counterparts with regard to attachment styles. While attachment styles can apparently distinguish between types of offenders, (i.e., sex offenders from non-sex offenders; Lyn & Burton, 2005), it cannot distinguish between offenders that are gang members and offenders that are not. Peters (2001) speculated that being rejected by pro-social peers leads to association with a deviant peer group and that the gang is simply one form the deviant peer group takes. The current findings seem to support this notion, as level of gang-affiliation played no part in degree of peer attachment.

The findings that individual questions on the attachment measures were correlated with certain gang activities, may indicate that certain feelings or attitudes towards parents and peers may prompt certain types of externalizing behaviours that

may be gang-related, or be similar to behaviours that gang members display. Further research into the factors that increase and protective factors that decrease gang activities might focus on more fine-grained analyses of parental relationships than attachment.

Attachment and Separation

All participants in this study had experienced a separation from their attachment figure, as all were incarcerated at the time of the study. However, over half indicated that they had experienced such a separation in addition to incarceration. As follows from attachment theory, which hypothesizes that separation from the caregiver can result in disruptions to attachment, this study found that having lived only with their natural parents was associated with increased parental attachment, increased communication with parents, greater trust in their parents, and feeling that their parents were more available for them. This is in support of the theory.

Limitations of the Current Study

As previously explained, there was some degree of difficulty in interpreting the Relationship Questionnaire because of the way in which participants completed it. This questionnaire may require further modification for use with this population to reduce any confusion. This will allow for greater confidence to be placed in the results than is possible in the current study.

External validity, that is the ability to generalize from one population to another, is inherently weak in this study for several reasons. The first is that it was not possible, ethically or practically, to sample from the entire population in the

detention facility, nor to randomly select participants. Participants volunteered for this study; therefore there was some degree of self-selection. Since there was no benefit to participants for volunteering in this study, it is possible that those who volunteered differed in some significant way from the general prison population. Perhaps they were the more pro-social subset of incarcerated offenders and therefore more securely attached according to theory, than those who did not volunteer. In addition, the sample represents only those offenders who are currently incarcerated, which automatically differentiates them from those offenders who have never been incarcerated.

In addition, if it is true as previously speculated that only the more pro-social of the prison population volunteered, it is also possible that they completed the questionnaires in such a way as to appear socially desirable. Although participants were unaware of the researcher's hypotheses, it is still possible that they either negated some of their gang activity or answered the questions to make their parents and peers appear in a more positive light. Alternatively, participants may have also exaggerated their gang-involvement in an attempt to impress the examiner or have portrayed their parents and peers in an excessively negative way.

This leads to an inherent limitation in the use of questionnaires for assessing attachment style. Using an instrument such as the RQ reduces the statistical conclusions that can be drawn and assumes that all individuals can be placed into only one category, ignoring the extent to which each statement might be representative of a subject (Becker et al., 1997). Additionally, self-report measures of attachment likely reflect conscious evaluation of the relationships and thus really

assesses the perception the subject has of the security or insecurity of the relationship and is not necessarily a true index of the security in a relationship (West et al., 1998). Assessing memories or reconstructions of the relationship would not include aspects of the attachment pattern that are inaccessible to conscious awareness (Simpson & Rholes, 1998; Sperling & Berman, 1994).

A disproportionate number of minority youth are gang members, although it is not clear if ethnicity itself is a risk factor or if it simply mediates other risk factors such as parenting practices, peers, and self-esteem (Peters, 2001). However, data regarding ethnicity was another variable not collected or controlled for in this study. Family is defined differently amongst cultures, which may impact the attachment relationship. For example, a traditional Aboriginal family is multigenerational. Aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, parents, and siblings maintain close relations and may even live together. Family is not only defined by blood, but by relationship (Sutton & Broken Nose, 1996). The attachment figure in these types of families may not be the biological parents, however the questionnaires in the current study referred specifically to "parents". Further research into the effects of ethnicity on attachment is needed.

The GMI was a questionnaire designed to assess gang-activity in adolescents in the United States in 1992. Given the evolving nature of gangs, it is possible that the questionnaire itself was not entirely relevant to adolescents in Canada in 2007. An updated version of this questionnaire should be addressed in future research.

One comment on the open-ended question of the GMI indicated that the participant had joined a gang not because he wanted to, but to survive. The

participant indicated that in his neighbourhood, virtually everyone belongs to a gang and that he would not have survived if he had not joined. Many teens report joining a gang out of fear for their personal safety (Walker-Barnes, 2000). At-risk youth report that association with a gang lessens the chances of being victimized by others, including rival gangs (Walker-Barnes). Additionally, gang members may physically intimidate non-gang members in an effort to force them to join a gang. Adolescents who join gangs to survive or to prevent perceived harm to self, may differ significantly from adolescents who join gangs because they want to. This has not been addressed in other research.

Competing Theories on Gang Development and Other Risk Factors

Attachment does not appear to be related to gang-membership, implying that there are other reasons why adolescents join gangs. Many other theories abound as to why adolescents join gangs. One theory, the rational choice theory, states that crime is a rational choice made after considering both personal factors and situational factors (Siegel & McCormick, 2003). The reasoning criminal evaluates the potential value of the crime he/she is about to commit against the risk of being caught and the seriousness of the potential punishment if apprehended (Siegel & McCormick). Applied to gangs, this theory would suggest that adolescents make a rational choice to join a gang, weighing out the pros and the cons of such a decision, and making a logical choice based upon this. Trait theories suggest that some people are born or raised "crime-prone" whether due to biological or psychological factors and that these traits make it more or less likely that one will decide to commit crimes or join a gang (Siegel & McCormick). Social structure theory posits that

"forces operating in deteriorated lower-class areas push many of their residents into criminal behaviour patterns" (Siegel & McCormick, 2003, p. 177). High unemployment, school dropout, deteriorated housing, single-parent households, and the gap between wants/needs and the means to meet them result in the development of a unique subculture with its own values and norms. This subculture may take the form of a gang, with its own underground economy (Siegel & McCormick). Social conflict theory explains crime as the outcome of class struggle; that crime is caused by class conflict resulting from an unequal distribution of money and power (Siegel & McCormick). Therefore gangs are a result of the unfairness that characterizes society. Social process theory argues that criminality is a result of the socialization process (Siegel & McCormick). Family, the educational system, peers, and religion are important players in the socialization process of adolescents. Social process theory states that it is a normal part of the socialization process for adolescents to form cliques, groups, or crowds; the gang may simply be an extension of this if the group that forms is a delinquent one (Siegel & McCormick). Thus adolescents learn to be gang members.

Adolescence is not only a time of high stress, it is also a time of boredom. When not in school, the unemployed adolescent may have little else to do. The gang is a realistic solution to this boredom; not only does it provide friends, it also provides recreation in the form of access to sex, alcohol, drugs, and the rush that accompanies illegal activity (Wiederhold, 1997). This may be particularly attractive to youth from low socioeconomic backgrounds that are unable to gain access to material goods by legal means. "Simply put, being poor means being bored; there

are few organized recreational activities, no jobs, no vocational training opportunities, no money" (Joe, 1995).

Gang membership may also be due, in part, to a desire for risk-seeking behaviours, of which the gang provides an ample supply. In a study of 341 youth in Utah, for example, it was found that gang members were more likely to want to drive a vehicle fast than non-gang members were (Wiederhold, 1997). This variable was actually found to be a good predictor of gang-membership, as was another risk-taking variable: doing dangerous things such as rock climbing. Gang members again were more likely to enjoy doing dangerous things than were the delinquent but non-gang group and the non-delinquent non-gang control group (Wiederhold).

Gender has been found in the past to be a good predictor of gang membership, with males being at higher risk for gang membership than females (Wiederhold, 1997). This however is changing. There are an increasing number of female adolescents joining gangs as well as an increasing number of female gangs. Therefore gender is no longer the strong predictor that it used to be. Gender may be a risk factor, but it is unlikely to be a reason that adolescents join gangs.

In spite of the various theories and research studies, including this one, that have attempted to explain why adolescents join gangs, no one answer has yet been discovered, it appears that there may not be one answer. Adolescents appear to join gangs for a variety of reasons, both personal and environmental.

Dukes et al. (1997) concluded that

> gang members tended to be persons with identity problems who did not feel good about themselves, had less confidence in their academic

> abilities, had lower feelings of purpose in life, and had weak attachments to their ethnic group. These individuals appeared to be less integrated into societal institutions, as shown by our measures of social bonds. (Dukes et al., 1997 p. 135)

Although not every gang member has all of these characteristics, maybe not even most of these characteristics, each characteristic that they do have is one more risk factor. The more risk factors that a youth has, the more at risk they are for joining a gang (Peters, 2001).

Implications for Counselling

The results of this study indicate that attachment does not play a role in gang membership and so should not be pursued as a means to decrease involvement in antisocial gangs. The root causes of gang membership, such as poverty and violence, should be addressed, not individual pathology.

References

2003 Annual Report on Organized Crime in Canada (2003). *CriminalIntelligence Service Canada.* Ottawa.

Ainsworth, M. D.(1989). Attachments beyond infancy. *American Psychologist, 44(4),* 709-716.

Ainsworth, M. S., Blehar, M. C., Waters, E., & Wall, S. (1978). *Patterns of Attachment: A Psychological Study of the Strange Situation.* Oxford: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Armsden, G. C. & Greenberg, M. T. (1987). The inventory of parent and peer attachment: Individual differences and their relationship to psychological well-being in adolescence. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 16(5),* 427-454.

Bartholomew, K. & Horowitz, L. M. (1991). Attachment styles among young adults: a test of a four-category model. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 61(2),* 226-244.

Becker, T. E., Billings, R. S., Eveleth, D. M., Gilbert, N. W. (1997). Validity of scores on three attachment style scales; exploratory and confirmatory evidence. *Education and Psychological Measurement, 57(3),* 477-493.

Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment and Loss Volume 1: Attachment.* New York: Basic Books.

Carver, C.S. & Scheier, M.F. (2004). *Perspectives on Personality.* Boston: Pearson Education Inc.

Cassidy, J. & Mohr, J. J. (2001). Unsolvable fear, trauma, and psychopathology: Theory, research, and clinical considerations related to disorganized attachment across the life span. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice, 8(3),* 275–298.

Cassidy, J. & Shaver, P. R. (Eds.) (1999). *Handbook of attachment: Theory, research, and clinical applications*. New York: Guilford Press.

Cox, R. P. (1996). An exploration of the demographic and social correlates of criminal behavior among adolescent males. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 19(1),* 17-24.

Curry, G. D. & Spergel, I. A. (1992). Gang involvement and delinquency among Hispanic and African-American adolescent males. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency, 29(3),* 273-291.

Dishion, T. J., Neslon, S. E., & Yasui, M. (2005). Predicting early adolescent gang involvement from middle school adaptation. *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology, 34(1),* 62-73.

Dukes, R. L., Martinez, R. O., & Stein, J. A. (1997). Precursors and consequences of membership in youth gangs. *Youth & Society, 29(2),* 123-136.

Elgar, F. J., Knight, J., Worrall, G. J., & Sherman, G. (2003). Attachment Characteristics and behavioural problems in rural and urban juvenile delinquents. *Child Psychiatry and Human Development, 34(1),* 35-48.

Fairchild, S. R. (2006). Understanding attachment: reliability and validity of selected attachment measures for preschoolers and children. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal, 23(2),* 235-261.

Joe, K. A. (1995). Just every mother's angel: an analysis of gender and ethnic variations in young gang membership. *Gender & Society, 9(4),* 408-431.

Kaplan, H. B., Johnson, R. J., & Bailey, C. A. (1986). Self-rejection and the explanation of deviance: Refinement and elaboration of a latent structure. *Social Psychology Quarterly 49(2),* 110-128.

Kee, C., Sim, K., Teoh, J., Tian, C. S., & Ng, K.H. (2003). Individual and familial characteristics of youths involved in street corner gangs in Singapore. *Journal of Adolescence, 26(4),* 401-412.

Kratcoski, P. C. & Kratcoski L. D. (1996). *Juvenile Delinquency.* New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc.

Lewis, M., Feiring, C., McGuffog, C., & Jaskir, J.(1984). Predicting psychopathology in six year olds from early social relations. *Child Development,* 55, 123-136.

Lloyd, J. D. (ed.) (2002). *Gangs.* San Diego: Greenhaven Press.

Longorio, R. (2005). Parent and peer attachment in delinquent adolescent Latino males. *Dissertation Abstracts International.* (UMI No. AAT3149642).

Lyn, T. S. & Burton, D. L. (2005). Attachment, anger and anxiety of male sexual offenders. *Journal of Sexual Aggression, 11(2),* 127-137.

Lyons-Ruth, K., Alpern, L., & Repacholi, B. (1993). Disorganized infant attachment classification and maternal psychosocial problems as predictors of hostile-aggressive behaviour in the pre-school classroom. *Child Development, 64(2),* 572-585.

Lyons-Ruth, K., Easterbrook, M. A., & Libelli, C. D. (1997). Infant attachment strategies, infant mental lag, and maternal depressive symptoms: Predictors of internalizing and externalizing problems at age 7. *Developmental Psychology, 33(4),* 681-692.

Makar, J. (1992). Loneliness, attachment style, hostility, and control: A comparison of high school students and young offenders. *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 31(03), 1384. (UMI No. MM72819).

McKay, M. A. (1998). An investigation of the decision-making process and self-esteem in adolescent gang membership. *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 59(2-B), 604. (UMI No. AAM9824721).

Muris, P., Meesters, C., & van den Berg, S. (2003). Internalizing and externalizing problems as correlates of self-reported attachment style and perceived parental rearing in normal adolescents. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 12(2),* 171-183.

Muris, P., Meesters, C., van Melick, M., & Zwambag, L. (2001). Self-reported attachment style, attachment quality, and symptoms of anxiety and depression in young adolescents. *Personality of Individual Differences, 30,* 809-818.

Muuss, R. E (1996). *Theories of Adolescence* (6th ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.

Peters, S. M. (2001). Youth gang involvement in early adolescence: An examination of environmental and individual risk factors. *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 62(12-B), 6000. (UMI No. AAI3035164)

Pillen, M. B. & Hoewing-Roberson, R. C. (1992). *Determining youth gang membership: development of a self-report instrument*. Bloomington: Chestnut Health Systems:

Ponce, F. (2005). Family and environmental influences in gang membership. *Masters Abstracts International*, 43(01), 110. (UMI No. AAT 1421584)

Richter-White, H. (2003). *The direct and indirect impacts of organized crime on youth, as offenders and victims*. Ottawa: Research and Evaluation Branch, Royal Canadian Mounted Police

Shaffer, D. R., Wood, E., & Willoughby, T. (2002). *Developmental Psychology: .Childhood and Adolescence*. Scarborough: Nelson.

Siegal, L. J. & McCormick, C. (2003). *Criminology in Canada: Theories, Patterns, and Typologies* (2nd ed.). Scarborough: Thomson-Nelson.

Simpson, J. A. & Rholes, W. S. (Eds.). (1998). *Attachment theory and close relationships*. New York: Guilford Press.

Simpson, J. A. & Rholes, W. S. (Eds.). (2004). *Adult attachment theory, research, and clinical implications*. New York: Guilford Press.

Sperling, M. B. & Berman, W. H. (Eds.). (1994). *Attachment in adults: Clinical and developmental perspectives*. New York: Guilford Press.

Sutton, C. T. & Broken Nose, M. A. (1996) American Indian families: an Overview. In M. McGoldrick, J. Giordano, & J. Pearce (Eds.), *Ethnicity and family therapy* (pp. 31-44). New York: Guilford Press.

Walker-Barnes, C. J. (2000). Risk factors of gang involvement among ninth grade students: a prospective investigation. *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 60(10-B), 5236. (UMI No. AAI9948791)

Walker-Barnes, C. J. & Mason, C. A. (2001). Ethnic differences in the effect of parenting on gang involvement and gang delinquency: a longitudinal, hierarchical linear modeling perspective. *Child Development, 72(6)*, 1814-1831.

Walker-Barnes, C. J. & Mason, C. (2004). Delinquency and substance use among gang-involved youth: the moderating role of parenting practices. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 34*, 235-250.

Wang, A. Y. (1994). Pride and prejudice in high school gang members. *Adolescence, 29(114)*, 279-291.

Ward, T., Hudson, S. M, & Marshall, W. L. (1996). Attachment style in sex offenders: a preliminary study. *The Journal of Sex Research, 33(1)*, 17-26.

West, M., Rose, S. M., Spreng, S., Sheldon-Keller, A., & Adam, K. (1998). Adolescent attachment questionnaire: a brief assessment of attachment in adolescence. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 27(5)*, 661-670.

Wiederhold, T. (1999). Predictive variables of gang membership and the structure of gangs in Utah County. *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 58(2), 964. (UMI No. AAT9721510)